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ABSTRACT

Modern Ethiopia has made progress that has altered the status and functions of its various languages. With modernization, the reasons for and means of interethnic contact have multiplied, creating the need for a common language. Amharic, once confined to a rather small area, has spread geographically and grown in status in the last thousand years, and has assumed the role of a common language. Now it is a relatively developed and standardized language with an extensive literary heritage appealing to a growing population. It is also closely associated with opportunity and is gaining popularity among the young. Bilingualism is increasing. However, until Amharic serves both the urban and rural populations and attains a higher level of linguistic development, it will not become a truly common tongue. For those changes to occur, Ethiopia must reach a higher level of socioeconomic and cultural development and promote a language policy that accommodates popular needs associated with the use of local, national, and international languages alike. A five-page reference list concludes the document. (MSE)

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THE EMERGENCE OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE IN ETHIOPIA: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The emergence and development of national languages are generallly coterminous with the growth of nations. It is usually along with and equal to the progress made by their respective societies that vernacular languages become media of literature and develop their grammatical, lexical, orthoepic and orthographic norms. It is also in response to their society's communication needs that their vocabularies expand and their spread across social and spatial boundaries are effected. Thus, the development of national languages is primarily conditioned by the type and extent of the political, economic, social and cultural progress achieved in their respective societies and not by the particular nature of their linguistic structures. For the most part "the other major elements of nationality such as political and educational institutions, literature, territory, group loyalities and nationalistic movements, and frequently even sovereign states and customs areas are closely interconnected with the language factor" (Deutch 1968:598).

However, the factors that form the basis for the emergence and growth of national languages are not the same everywhere. They vary in time and space. "The concrete historical circumstances, the period in which the foundations for a national literary language are laid, the degree of dialect persistence, and above all, the character of the language relationship of the national period" (Guxman 1968:778) differ from case to case. Within this general framework, the formation, the growth and the nature of the national language in Ethiopia is examined below.

1. The sociocultural background

Ethiopia has been aptly described as "un museo di populi" (Conti Rossini 1935). Certainly, Ethiopia is ethnically diverse and culturally plural, and this is not a present day phenomenon only. Heterogeneity has always been one of Ethiopia's distinguishing features. For millenia, speakers of various Cushitic, Nilotic, Omotic and Semitic languages have cohabited in Ethiopia. Major religions, such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, along with traditional religions, have also been practiced by one group or another. All these have acted and reacted upon one another making a fundamental cultural unity of Ethiopia (Levine 1974). Linguistically, both from the languages genetic relationships and from the long and close interactions of these various tongues, Ethiopia has become a distinct linguistic area (Ferguson 1976).

The relationship of the peoples that made Ethiopia has been variable. Sometimes it was close, at other times distant and loose. At times it was peaceful and amicable; at others it was characterized by feuding and fighting. The relationship might have been "now thin and localized, now extensive and profound but never absent" (Levine 1974:40). The group that was once the victor had become the vanquished at a later time and vice versa. The extent of the country had changed on several occasions. What was once the center had become the periphery and the periphery the center. Thus, the ally and adversary, the victorious and vanquished, the dominant and dominated, and the

privileged and underprivileged distinctions were to be made at any one time in the long history of the country. It was these kinds of relationships that enabled some groups to impose their will, including their cultures and languages. In the process, the relative statuses and functions of the various languages have been determined. Consequently, some languages have come to be used more widely and for more diversified purposes than others.

2. The language situation

The Ethiopian language situation is certainly complex. Some seventy distinct languages, each with its dialects, are spoken within the borders of the country. Of these, only three --Amharic, Oromo, and Tigrigna-- are spoken by over a million speakers. According to the latest figures (Bender et al. 1976), the mother-tongue speakers of these three languages account for three-quarters of the entire population. It is believed that each is spoken by 32%, 28% and 14.5%, respectively. These are what Ferguson (1966) would call major languages. The rest of the Ethiopian languages are spoken by 25% of the population. Out of these, about ten have been identified as minor languages. That leaves 80% of the langauges "which are spoken by small numbers of people, often only several thousand or even fewer" (Bender 1976:12).

The uses of most Ethiopian languages are thus very limited. They are of local significance only. Those that have cross-cultural functions are few in number. Among the minor

languages, Afar, Somali, Wellayita and Keffa-mocha function as such, but they are usually limited to sub-regional levels. The functions of the major languages are relatively extensive. Tigrigna is the major contact language in the two northern Administrative Regions of Tigray and Eritra. Oromo is the contact tongue in the Southern, Western and Eastern Regions. By comparison, both the number of speakers and the size of the area where Oromo is spoken are by far greater than those of Tigrigna, but as a contact language, Orono is strictly regional also.

The only language of national significance is Amharic. Like Oromo and Tigrigna, it too has its regional base --the central highland regions that lie between the Oromo and Tigrigna-speaking areas. Unlike them, however, Amharic has transcended its traditional boundaries. It is now the most learned and widely used language in the country (Bender et al. 1976). Some fifty percent of the country's population is believed to use it in one capacity or another (Richter, Ms).

Ethiopia also has two languages of special purposes, Geez and Arabic. The former is the medium that Christian Ethiopians have used for the last sixteen centuries. It has a rich literary heritage. Until the turn of this century, it was also the primary medium of writing also. Arabic is its counterpart among Muslim Ethiopians. In its pidginized varities, Arabic is also used as a contact language in certain communities.

The linguistic situation is rendered even more complex by the superposition of still other languages in recent times. Of

these, English stands out. Since the Second World War, it has become the primary foreign tongue in the country. It is the medium of instruction in the secondary schools and institutes of higher learning. It is also the sole means of the country's international relations and of acquiring science and technology. Some specialized agencies (technical-oriented institutions) within the country also use English to run their daily business.

The other foreign languages are French and Italian. Their role in present-day Ethiopia is marginal and is increasingly diminishing. In the early days of the advent of modernization, French was the dominant medium in the country. Since The Second World War all that has changed, and French has been relegated to an unimportant function/role in Ethiopia. Italian is also a marginal tongue in the country. With the gradual diminishing of Italian influence in the country, the use of Italian has accordingly shrunk. Unlike English and French, however, Italian in its pidginized variety had become a contact langauge in some parts of the coutnry. That too is fast diminishing.

3. The emergence of the national language

An appraisal of the history of Ethiopia readily reveals distinct stages in the development of its national language. For convenience these stages will be considered in chronological order.

3.1 The Lisane Nigus period

In terms of historical space, the Lisane Nigus (King's Tongue) period occupies a long span of time. It covers the Aksumite period (from the cradel of Ethiopian civilization up to the end of the first millenium A.D.), the Zagwé Era (from the fall of Aksum to the end of the 13th century) and the greater part of the reign of the "Solomonic" dynasty (from the fall of Zagwé to the middle of the last century). Although the historical period under consideration is very long, there is a remarkable similarity between any two points in time in as far as the designation of the common medium, its functions, and the extent of its use were concerned. The medium so chosen was invariably the language of the Nigus (King), hence the name Lisane Nigus (King's tongue). The functions of the Lisance Nigus and the extent of its use had always been limited throughout this period.

3.1.1 The designation of the Lisane Nigus

According to the available sources--oral traditions and written documents--only two languages seem to have attained the Lisane Nigus status. The fist of these is Geez (Old Ethiopic, Ethiopic), which succeeded in obtaining the status during the first millenium of our time. The second tongue to attain prominence for a considerable period of time is Amharic, and its period covers most of the second millenium up to the present.

Geez is one of the tongues which was used in ancient Ethiopia. The extent of its use is not exactly known. The general understanding is that it was spoken by the Aksumites in what is now northern Ethiopia in the administrative regions of Tigray and Eritrea. It is also believed to have been used as a contact language in the Aksumite empire (Ullendorff 1960). Its rise to prominence was due to its association with the sources of political power and social dominance of the period. With Aksum as their capital and cultural center, Geez-speaking monarchs and/or those who favored it had attained hegemony over the rest of the contending forces for a large portion of the time. That made Geez rise to dominant status as opposed to the tongues of the vanquished.

Starting at the first century A.D., the importance of Aksum had started to grow. It became a prosperous trade center. Trade routes to and from Ethiopia all led to Aksum. The sociocultural development of Aksum was such that it induced the development of a writing system. When one became available, it was the language of the dominant group, Geez, that was reduced to writing. On the many stone inscriptions excavated from various sites, Geez happens to be the only language to be employed for the purpose. With the advent of Christianity in the middle of the 4th century, Geez became the sole medium of religion and literary purposes in general. In time, the use of other media, such as Greek, was abandoned in favor of Geez. As the new religion acquired more and more indigenous character, both sacred and secular books were

translated and composed in Geez alone. Thus, the association between Geez and writing in general, and religious writing in particular, was cemented early on.

Towards the end of the first millenium, the power and influence of Aksum began to decline. Consequently, socio-political power shifted southwards, first to Lasta (c. 1150-1270) and eventually to Shewa (1270-1974). Since then, the locus of the political scene has moved and remained in what generally came to be known as an Amharic-speaking area. The "Solomonic" dynasty that ruled the country has been essentially Amharic-speaking. Thus, the association of Amharic with the institutions of power and prestige, the Bète Mengist (Royal Palace) and the person, Niguse Negest (King of Kings) was naturally established and maintained. Because of this association, Amharic came to be known as the Lisane Nigus.

In the domains of religion and literature, Amharic had been unable to make any significant headway for a long time. Until the turn of this century, the status of Geez in these domains was almost a sanctity. In the eyes of the general public, the relationship of Geez and the religion are still sacred. The clergy which monopolized the reading and writing culture did not see any advantage in changing the old medium to Amharic or any other medium. Thus, Amharic, as the Lisane Nigus, and Geez, as the Lisane Sihuf (language/tongue of writing), have since been in a diglossic relationship. The designations were so clear that each language was synonymous with its respective functions.

3.1.2 Struggle for dominance - Lisane Nigus status

As Lisane Negest, neither Amharic nor Geez were without rivals. At Aksum the reign of government was not solely and exclusively controlled by the Geez-speaking monarchs, although they were the most dominant. Political power had changed hands on several occasions. Other language groups, such as the Agnew, Beja, and Felasha, had succeeded, at some time or another, in assuming political power (Getachew, Ms.). Unfortunately, for various reasons, the roles they played and the contributions they made to the making of Ethiopia have not been duely recognized to this day. If anything, they are considered as wanton destructionists of Ethiopian civilization and state. Their leaders are regarded as unlawful usurpers of the throne. In general, the tradition propagated by both state and church has been mainly to undermine the interests and aspirations of these groups. Thus, as of now, we are unable to dtermine the tongue(s) each of these groups might have used for official duties when they achieved political hegemony and social dominance.

This is very much true of the Zagwé monarchs who effectively dominated the politics of the country for over a century (c. 1150-1250). They, too, are considered as unlawful usurpers of the throne. In spite of their recent history and monumental achievements, like the great rock-hewn churches, they have not been accorded their rightful place in the history and traditions of the country. As kings, the Zagwé monarchs are often despised by both officialdom and church. What reaches us is so meager that

we are unable to exactly identify their official tongue.

In the domain of religion, however, they seem to have opted for the use of Geez. For religious purposes, the use of Geez in regions adjacent to Aksum seems to have begun during the Aksumite period. The Agews' acceptance of Geez as the language of the church must have antedated the Zagwés assumption of political power. Furthermore, their decision to continue to use Geez for religious purposes might have been dictated by political considerations also. During the reign of the Zagwé Kings, the glory of Aksum was too fresh to forget and ignore. The Zagwé, residing between the two contenders to the throne --the Aksumites in the north and the Amhara in the south-- seem to have chosen to adopt the religion along with its medium for political expediency.

However, the use of Geez for everyday purposes seems to have been unlikely. For one, the Zagwé had moved the center of their government from Aksum to Lasta, the heartland of the Agew people. Secondly, the use of Geez for this purpose in Lasta had not been reported. Besides the Zagwé assumed power only after a long and bitter civil war that almost consumed Aksum. In fact, Geez had reportedly become extinct by the time of the ascendance of the Zagwé. It is only logical to imagine, therefore, that the victors, the Zagwé monarchs in this case, used their own tongue, Agew, in the courts they managed and among the army they commanded much in the same way the Amharic-speaking monarchs did after them. This might have been true of others also.

Amharic, as a Lisane Nigus, had also been challenged at various times by different languages. Chief among these were Adal, Oromo (previously called Galla) and Tigrigna. The first of the challenges came from Adal. Adal was the primary political rival of the "Solomonic" dynasty from the beginning. For centuries, the Adalites were conquered and subjugated by the "Solomonic" Christian monarchs. After a long and arduous struggle, Adal gained the upper hand. Under the leadership of Ahmed Gragn (1527-1542), the Christian monarch was conclusively defeated, and a large part of the country came under Adalite influence. In many instances churches and monasteries were looted and burned, and the people converted to Islam. The early and sweeping victories of Adal came to an abrupt end in 1542. In an engagement, Ahmed was killed and his army disbanded in 1542. For fifteen years Ahmed traversed the length and width of the country without having enough time to institute himself as a legitimate national leader and to establish a tradition to that effect. The chances for Adal to rise to prominence and to become a Lisane Nigus was thus lost.

The other language that came much closer to achieving the Lisane Nigus status, or perhaps had done so for a brief period, was Oromo. Since the second half of the 16th century, the presence of the Oromo was increasingly felt in most parts of the country. Following the successful campaign of Ahmed Gragna, the Christian monarch was greatly weakened and transferred his capital from Shewa to Gondar. The Oromo easily moved into more

areas than were formerly controlled by the emperor. By the end of the 17th century, the Oromo had "swamped most parts of Shoa (Shewa) province, reached Amhara, and extended to the southern and eastern regions of Lasta. They settled all along the outer fringes of the plateau in an immense semicircle, leaving untouched only the northern highlands, the area of the old Aksumite kingdom" (Ullendorff 1960:76). Eventually they reached the gate of the imperial capital, Gondar. Gradually they became a power with which to reckon. Many times even the monarchs at Gondar sought their assistance to keep themselves in power.

By and large, the conditions that transpired in the 17th and 18th centuries would have been favorable for the Oromo to become dominant, if they had taken advantage of them. Taken together, the Oromo constituted the strongest force, perhaps because they were not affected by the civil war that wrecked the country. After the death of Ahmed Gragn, Adal had been reduced to a second-rate power. The "Solomonic" monarchs were also so weak that they were virtually prisoners in their royal palace at Gondar. The Oromo were thus able to move to almost all parts of the country without much difficulty.

In spite of all this, however, they did not attempt to assume royal power. Their apparent inability has been attributed to their social system (Abir 1968, Jones and Monroe 1965, Markakis 1974, Rubenson 1968, Trimingham 1952). At that time they had no centralized authority. They were comprised of a loose confederation of tribes, who, for the most part, were engaged in

non-sedantatry life. As pasturalist they got what they needed and moved constantly and freely. They fought against all those who deterred their movements, including their own brethren. They did not seem to go to any particular area with the purpose of conquering and subjugation. Besides, "they were quite as willing to fight for the king of Abyssenia (Ethiopia) as against him, and the king had settled a large body in Dambya province near Lake Tana, these found an important to the royal army" (Jones and Monroe 1965:105). Thus having failed or having been unwilling to assume power, although they had the means, the Oromos were not in a position where they could have raised and promoted their culture and language to a national level.

In time, the Oromo settled in various parts of the country. Those who settled in the north alongside the Amhara became farmers. Eventually "a process of assimilation with the earlier Amharic-speaking population started. A Galla nobility emerged and through military service and intermarriage gained political influence on the level of the whole state" (Rubenson 1976:32). Oromo supremacy reached its peak when a half-Oromo prince, Iyoas, was crowned as Niguse Negest in 1755 at Gondar (Budge 1928). With him the chances for Oromo to become a Lisane Nigus became a reality.

Iyoas was crowned at a very tender age, which made it possible for his Oromo mother to rule the country as regent. For that purpose, she summoned her Oromo brothers to assist her in governing the empire from Gondar, an Amharic-speaking

heartland. Her brothers came with a large contingent of Oromo soldiers, their households and retainers. Coupled with the large contingent that came with the Queen mother when she first married Iyoas' father, this drastically changed the composition of Gondar. The Oromos had also come and settled in the adjoining provinces, Yejju and Wello, Damot and the Lake Tana region.

In short, the scene seems to have been comforting to Iyoas since he initiated some bold steps. For one, he entrusted most of the important works of the empire to his maternal uncles. Secondly, he chose and used Oromo as the palace language. As Budge (1928:461) noted, "the only language spoken in the palace was Galla, and to all intents and purposes, the capital, Gondar, had become a Galla town. The Galla were not slow to see the opportunity which presented itself to them, and they intrigued and formed a government of their own with the king as their head." But soon the balance of power changed. Iyoas and his maternal uncles were unable to sustain themselves in power. Iyoas was murdered and most of his followers left Gondar (Budge 1928). With that the prominence of Oromo came to an abrupt end.

Following the death of Iyoas, the most important and powerful leader was Ras Michael Suhul of Tigray. Tigray was one of the most important principalities of the empire where contending forces were to rise. Michael had come to Gondar at the behest of the young emperor, Iyoas. Having come to Gondar at the head of a very large and well equipped army, Michael did not lose time in getting himself appointed Ras, the highest rank next to

the Nigus, and regent to the emperor. Perhaps because of the intentions of the emperor just discussed, the association between the two did not last long. They became bitter enemies, and the Ras had the emperor killed (Budge 1928). The Ras, however, did not seek the throne, although he could have done so without much difficulty. Instead he chose to use his power to choose one from the royal house and crowned him. Why he selected this course of action is not our concern here. The fact that he did so, however, had some bearing on the identity of the Lisane Nigus. Although the Ras often used Tigrigna in public and it was a commonly used tongue in Gondar (Bruce 1964), Tigrigna did not become the dominant tongue of the time. By not occupying the imperial throne when he could, Ras Michael seems to have denied Tigrigna the symbolic elevation it needed to become a Lisane Nigus. Thus Amharic was able to continue as a Lisane Nigus simply because however weak the person on the throne was, he was Amharic-speaking, and the symbolic bond between the language and the king was not severed.

To comprehend the change of the Lisane Nigus along with the dynasty, we need to examine the type of government that was operating then. The government of that time was inseparable with the person of the king. The two --government and kingship-- were integrated in the person of the monarch. The bureaucratic apparatus was essentially the king's household and trusted followers, which made the administrative center of the state. There was no separate administration unit, an institution by

itself and distinct from the king's household. There was no structure linking the center with the peripheries other than the occasional and unsystematic personal contacts between the august and his lieutenants. There was no national treasury either. All taxes collected belonged to the manarch. There was no separtion between the property of the king and the national treasury. He owned everything and disposed of it as he saw fit. In short, what we had was a government of a household with the king at its head. As it could be imagined, if and when the king was removed (killed or dethroned), the institutions which he created and headed, the ideals and aspirations he valued most and fought for, and the language he chose to use, invariably came to their demise quickly and soon were replaced by those of the new monarch.

Amharic and Geez became prominent languages because the monarchs that spoke them had essentially controlled the political and social sources of power for most of the time in their respective periods.

3.2 The functions and spread of Amharic as Lisane Nigus

For most of the last seven hundred years, the monarchs that dominated the politics of Ethiopia were Amharic-speaking. But the spread and development of Amharic have been very modest by comparison. The reason for this seems to lie in the sociocultural fabrics of the country.

3.2.1 Simple communicative needs

First, the structure of the government--the type of contact it was capable of establishing and maintaining between itself and the people and among its various principalities--was characteristically simple. The government was person-oriented and was centered on one man, the king. The interaction that was so desired was limited and was conducted on a man to man basis. There was no institutional and systematic contact/correspondence between the royal court and the various principalities. Whatever communication existed between the king and the regional princes was simple and irregular. The kings then were satisfied with any regional leader who paid his annual tributes and remained loyal to them (Taddesse 1972). The payment of tributes essentially constituted the bulk of the communication between them. Other than that, the regional leaders were themselves kings in their own right. They usually maintained independent local courts and were succeeded by their own relatives. As long as they remained loyal to the king, they did whatever they thought was in their best interest. The kings moved to certain regions only when their authority was challenged and moved out as soon as they established law and order or instituted new leaders of their choice.

Another factor that might have inhibited the development and spread of the Lisane Nigus, Amharic, was the constant change of the seat of government. During the reign of Geez-speaking monarchs, the center of the empire was Aksum. During the time of

the Zagwé it moved to Lasta, and during that of the "Solomonic" dynasty, it moved further south to Shewa, and lastly to Gondar. In fact, between the fall of Lasta in 1270, and the founding of Gondar in 1632, there was no fixed capital as such. At this juncture in Ethiopian history the royal "court actually changed its location at regular intervals" (Taddesse 1972:105). By constantly rotating their seat, the emperors were "able to play the role of protector of their people, and at the same time, to ensure the continued loyalty of the local hereditary rulers and royal appointees over them" (Korteen 1972:22).

However, as much as this suited their purposes, the absence of a permanent capital deprived the country of the formation of the means and ways of establishing and maintaining a permanent link between the center and the various regions. Under such circumstances, the development of a cadre of bureaucrats and professionals and the corresponding institutions and culture was hardly possible. Actually, there was no need for any of these. Consequently, the government of this period remained largely remote for the majority of the people or even unknown to some of them. And so was the language that was associated with such a government.

The kings in traditional Ethiopia could have met their communication needs without a common and elaborate tongue. The simple and infrequent interactions between the center and various regions, between the king and his lieutenants, and between the king and the people at large, could have been performed by any

tongue. Besides, the regional leaders, who themselves were contenders to the imperial throne, could hardly be expected to use the king's tongue in their semi-independent courts. In fact, their allegiance to the emperor was usually temporary. It was a bid for time. They submitted to the king's authority only as long as he had sufficient power to exercise it. If and when the conditions permitted, these princes declared their sovereignty and/or their contention to the throne. Thus, they could not have been willing agents for the steady use and spread of Amharic, one of the attributes of the king they would have liked to replace. This, however, is not to rule out the exceptions --those regional leaders who saw their fortunes rising in their close association with the king.

The king's contact with the general population was even worse. It was usually short, intermittent and most importantly, it was antagonistic. Following a campaign to subdue a rebellious leader, it was the people that usually received the brunt of the king's wrath. Oftentimes their settlements were burnt and their property looted or destroyed. Sometimes, they were either killed or enslaved. Under such circumstances, it is improbable to imagine a steady growth of the king's influence among his subjects. The Lisane Nigus identified with the king and his wreckless campaign could have hardly won acceptance among the populace.

The other factor that contributed to the stagnation of the Lisane Nigus lies in the nature of the economy which was

essentially subsistent. Each community, for that matter, each household was self-sufficint. It produced its own food, clothing and other necessitites. There was no need to go out of one's own community for want of the necessities of life, except salt. The absence of large and permanent towns had also inhibited the growth of internal trade. That is, there was no motivation for the people to produce what they were capable of producing. For the most part, trade was limited to bartering and was conducted among adjacent communities. Trade with other societies was even much more limited.

The only kind of trade that flourised to a certain extent dealt with rare and luxury items (gold, ivory, civet, slaves, etc.). The life of the general population was not greatly affected either at the production or consumption levels. Therefore, "the potential impact of trade in introducing new technologies and forcing social interaction through developing commercial interdependence were little felt by the average peasant" (Korten 1972:29). In linguistic terms, what all this means is that conditions required for the development of a lingua-franca did not arise in traditional Ethiopia. Besides, trade as a profession had not been favored by any of the dominant groups, including the Amhara. Those who were permitted to trade were either foreigners (the Greeks and Arabs) or minorities such as Ethiopian Muslims that spoke different languages. In those days, it was the traders that were learning the languages of their customers and not vice versa. Thus, the growth of a trade

langauge in traditional Ethiopia was curtailed by the limited nature of its commerce, and the web of conflicting interests that existed between those who controlled the commerce and those who controlled the controllers of commerce.

3.2.2 Some favorable factors

Again there were some exceptions. There were two factors that somehow promoted the spread of the Lisane Nigus. One of these was the establishment of military garrisons called Hadaris. The Hadaris were built "at different parts of the kingdom... to keep the stability of his (king's) kingdom" (Getachew, Ms). As part of their functions, the Hadaris might have served as centers for the growth of new communities with the language and culture of those who controlled the Hadaris as the core. As the royal army was usually composed of various ethnic groups, its common tongue was Amharic. Whenever the royal army or any segment of it moved and settled some place, Amharic seems to be the medium that went along. But the Hadaris could be composed of only one ethnic group over which the king had control. Hadaris seem to have been built by the Tigré, Adaré, Guragé, Argoba, Gofat, and so on. In cases like these, the Hadaris could not have promoted the king's tongue and culture.

The effectiveness of the Hadaris as language and culture traffickers was further affected by their inability to maintain effective communication with the center. Whenever and wherever the authority of the king declined, the Hadaris were effectively

cut off from the center. In time, some like the Argoba and Gafat became assimilated in language and/or culture with the dominant people around them. Hadaris established in regions contiguous to the center --Shewa and Damot-- were able to maintain their contact with the center under various circumstances. Thus they were constantly replenished with forces that carried the change even further with these Hadaris as the new centers.

During the heyday of the "Solomonic" dynasty (14th-16th centuries), the most consistent traffickers were the Ethiopian Orthodox Chruch missionaries (Getachew, Ms). The national Church which had benefited from the rise of powerful kings, such as Amde Tsion and Zere Yaiqob, carried Amharic along with the gospel. At times, some zealous missionaries seem to have spread both the religion and the language even further than the regions which were under the effective control of the king. By this period, the Church had reached as far south as the present-day Bale, Sidamo, Keffa and Gamu Goffa regions (Levine 1974, Taddesse 1972). Amharic was then serving as a contact langauge in these regions and was duely recognized as such by Portuguese travellers (Levine 1974). With the defeat of the Christian monarch by Adal and the subsequent mass movement of the Oromo people, both the Church and Amharic lost ground and were eventually replaced in many of these regions.

The sociocultural factors that prevailed in traditional Ethiopia had not only limited the spread of Amharic but also its functional diversity. Although reading and writing skills had

long existed in Ethiopia, Ethiopian culture had remained essentially oral until recently.

Reading and writing skills were limited in many respects. For one, the number of people who could read and write had always been very small. The only institution that needed them on a constant basis was the Church. The Church, as the only institution of learning, seems to have been producing what it needed, both in quantity and quality. The needs of the royal and regional courts were limited and were met by the clergy. Besides these two, there was hardly any need for literacy. The life of the average people did not require any reading or writing skills. The life style of the average educated Ethiopian priest was not any different from the peasants around him and did not attract them en masse. People who read and wrote outside the accepted institutions were considered social deviants. In addition, reading and writing were inherited as occupations. All these contributed to the high degree of illiteracy in the country.

Secondly, literary activities, other than those officially sanctioned by the Chruch and State, were actively discouraged in traditional Ethiopia. Popular literature in its written form did not develop as part of the general culture. The clergy that had the skill, the time and the luxury to do so were not that successful. The only literary activity they were able to cultivate was a kind of poetry called Qiné. But it was usually composed mainly in Geez and was oral. The poetry that so

developed did not go beyond the confines of the Church; and it was unable to employ other tongues. The only tongue that occasionally used it was Amharic, because most of the Quiné schools had thrived in Amharic-speaking areas. Poetry composed in the vernaculars and by the common people was not considered worthy until the recent past.

Lastly, the accepted and established medium of writing was Geez. No other tongue was considered appropriate for the purpose. Amharic was not reduced to writing until after it became the Lisane Nigus. The earliest available document dates back to the 14th century. Even then it was of a limited nature. The documents contain songs glorifying victorious emperors of the 14th and 15th centuries. As these songs were spontaneously produced, the old literary tongue, which was then extinct, could not have been used for the purpose. Thus the choice of Amharic was a practical necessity. Unfortunately, this practice was discontinued. Geez as a written medium reigned virtually unchallenged up to the middle of the 19th century.

However, the Lisane Nigus status which Amharic had assumed since 1270 was not without its advantages. As we have seen, it set Amharic apart and made it prestigious. Consequently, when the opportunities to use a living tongue arose, although admittedly limited, it was Amharic that was chosen for the purpose. The popular songs of the 14th and 15th centuries, and the religious controversy between the Portuguese Jesuits and the Ethiopian clergy were cases in point. Amharic's success in becoming the

auxiliary medium of Church functions --services and particularly education-- was due to its Lisane Nigus status also. When Geez became extinct and the sociocultural center of the country moved away from the old sites, the continued use of Geez in all the affairs of the Church must have become difficult.

At this time, the sociolinguisitc factor favoring the introduction of Amharic had begun to mature. For example, most of the important learning centers, such as Debre Haiq, Debre Libanos, and Debre Gol, that were later to play significant roles in the affairs of both the Church and the State, were established in the heartland of Amharic-speaking people (Taddesse 1972). The people that came to run these institutions, influence the State and spread the Gospel in the adjoining regions and beyond were either natives or were educated in the area. Amharic gradually became the common working tongue of the then emerging elite. Coupled with its Lisane Nigus status, this seems to have given Amharic the advantage over the other tongues.

Given the established status and functions of Geez, the use of Amharic as an auxiliary medium of the Church could only have been achieved very gradually over an extended period of time. But in time, Amharic became the common medium of instruction of the Church school system. At the lower levels, Amharic is the sole medium because neither the teacher nor the pupils know Geez. At higher levels, in schools of music, poetry and commentary, where a good knowledge of Geez is required, Amharic is used as a medium. Discussions as to the quality of the music, poetry or the

content of the religious text are invariably conducted-in Amharic. The Church had thus been using Amharic rather extensively, but without acknowledgement. Unintentionally, the Church was promoting Amharic towards a literary medium.

3.3 Amharic as Yemengist Quanqua

The period of Yemengist Quanqua (language of government) covers the last hundred years or so that elapsed since the rise of Tewodros to the imperial throne (1855-1868) heralding the beginning of modern Ethiopia, an Ethiopia with decidedly new and different needs. The advent of modernization and centralization of political power have changed the communication needs of the country favoring the establishment of a common, standard tongue.

At the foundation of this change is the formation of the modern state of Ethiopia. During the early decades of the 19th century, Ethiopia was suddenly awakened from its centuries-old isolation and found that it was encircled by several enemies. The Egyptians, Turks, Italians and others had come to its doorsteps and were threatening to invade the country. The threats were so real that the various regional leaders were forced to make choices between remaining divided and risking colonization, and uniting the divided country and forming a strong defence to maintain their collective sovereignty. Having opted for the former, each major regional leader was actively seeking to unite the country under his or her rule. They allied and reallied and fought against each other until at last one of them emerged

victorious. The first to succeed in forging the badly needed unity was Tewodros (1855-1868). With his ascencance to the throne, the dawn of modern Ethiopia and the use of a common medium began.

It must be admitted that Tewodros' success was limited. In fact, his importance lies not in what he achieved as in what he envisioned. What he envisioned was a united, modernized and therefore strong Ethiopia capable of defending its own interest (Rubenson 1976). As part of that vision, he seems to have recognized the need of a common medium. He was reportedly keen in promoting such a medium. His choice was Amharic, perhaps because it was the Lisane Nigus and had on occasions appeared in writing. Tewodros did not seem to prefer Geez for the purpose. If anything, he strongly and openly urged its replacement by Amharic. Even in the domain of religion, his preference for Amharic was direct. When he was presented with a Geez scripture, he was quoted as having said, "Why do you bring such books which nobody understands? The translation (Amharic) is much better" (cited in Brown 1976:311). His pragmatic considerations proved correct in time.

At first, however, the clergy, which dominated the reading and writing culture, resisted his innovation. Among other things, for the clergy, Amharic was a profane tongue and could not be used in place of Geez. Despite the resistence of the clergy, the group he needed to achieve his purposes, Tewodros insisted on using Amharic for writing purposes. He let his chronicle be

written in Amharic for the first time ever. Against established tradition, he used to read the Bible in Amharic. To the dissatisfaction of the clergy, he encouraged foreign missionaries to translate, publish and distribute the Holy Scriptures in Amharic and teach in it too (Rubenson 1976). In so doing, he seems to have set a new direction for the spread and use of Amharic. In general terms, his attempts were symbolically comparable to what was done in Europe on the eve of the rise of nationalism which necessistated the use of the various vernaculars in place of the old literary tongues and the corresponding veneration of these vernaculars to national status in their respective countries.

It should be noted that Tewodros did not start from scratch. The use of Amharic, although not in regular fashion, had been noted before Tewodros assumed power. Some of the regional leaders (Sabagadis of Tigray, Wube of Simén and Tigray, Sahile Sillasie of Shewa, and Ras Ali II the Regent) had begun to use Amharic for their official correspondence. Foreign missionaries who had then started operating in various parts of the country had also chosen it over other tongues. They taught and preached in it. Of the many thousands of scriptures they distributed in the country, the great majority were in Amharic (Pankhurst 1962). All these were indicative of the changing conditions, but the actual symbolic transformation of Amharic into a written and official tongue of the emerging nation/state remained until the emperor Tewodros chose it and lent it his status and prestige.

Tewodros did not live long to see what became of his preferred common medium. As part of his vision--modernization of the society and centralization of its political apparatus--Amharic seems to have been inherited and promoted by his successors. Since then, Amharic has been inseparable from the state of modernizing Ethiopia.

The emperor who effectively succeeded Tewodros was Yohannes IV (1872-1889). Following tradition one would expect emperor Yohannes to institute his mother-tongue, Tigrigna, as the official medium of his court, but he did not. He continued to use Amharic for that purpose. Yohannes' preference of Amharic to other tongues for official functions could be explained in one of two ways. One, Amharic might have been sufficiently established as a permanent official medium of the state so that Yohannes had to follow suit. Or, two, the political situation was such that Yohannes found it expedient to continue to use Amharic for official functions. Yohannes' Ethiopia was comprised of: Tigray, his home base; Bégémidr and Hmhara, the previous center of the empire; Wello and Yejju of Michael; Gojjam and Damot of Tecle Haimanut; and Shewa and its tributaries of Menlik. Thus, most of the principalities of the empire were under Amharic-speaking regional kings/princes. Besieged by the continued aggression of the country's enemies, Yohannes had sought to maintain the country's unity on which the maintenance of its sovereignty depended to a great extent and for which he subsequently gave his life. Thus, if the choice of an official tongue had political

ramifications, it was Amharic that had greater dividends. Besides, he himself was known to have mastered an excellent command of Amharic (Zewdie 1975), thereby making the decision easier for him.

Yohannes' decision to use Amharic for official purposes was also significant on the socio-psychological level, because it demonstrated the tolerance needed for the emergence of a common medium. And tolerance is an important and necessary step towards convergence. Such a step is even more profound when an august decides to use one of his subjects' tongues. Thus by choosing to continue to use Amharic for his official duties, Yohannes seems to have confirmed Amharic's new official status as the language of government.

This transformation of Amharic as a medium of government should not be perceived as a consequence of the choice made by this or that monarch, but primarily as a result of the new social conditions that came to play decidedly important roles in modernizing Ethiopia. For any tongue to rise to such a status and function, the support and continued use of the elite is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. In history, every elite is not always fated to make its imprint permanent. If that were the case, Amharic could have attained this stage a long time ago, because as a Lisane Nigus it was certainly the choice of the emperors for a long time. The crucial factor is the development of the appropriate social conditions under which it would be possible for such persons to lend their prestige to the language

of their choice such that it became what they intended it to be. Thus, Tewodros and his successors were able to accomplish their purpose because the conditions were ripe for their actions. The decisions of Tewodros and his successors were prompted by the new social conditions which called for a need of a common tongue.

The period following the reign of Yohannes was even more favorable for the transformation of Amharic in the direction it had begun. For one, the monarchs that reigned until 1974 were all Amharic-speaking. In this regard, the roles Menlik (1889-1913) and Haile Sellasie (1930-1974) played are notable. Secondly, and most importantly, the overall social conditions have changed significantly favoring the extensive use of the common tongue, Amharic.

It was also because of these changing conditions that Amharic was able to replace Geez as Lisane Sihuf (language of writing). The clergy that previously opposed the use of Amharic for writing purposes had become, by the turn of the century, an enthusiastic supporter of the idea and part of the process of change. In fact, at the initial stage, it was the clergy that was called upon to do the job. As functionnaries of the new state, as teachers and writers, they used Amharic rather extensively and benefited from the change. Thus the clergy not only came to terms with the new status and functions of Amharic but also became its ardent propagators. The clergy was thus able to effectively bridge the gap between the old (the writing of Geez) and the new

(the use of Amharic). The domains where written Amharic came to be used were for the most part new ones:
mass media, public education, and the modern state apparatus. These domains facilitated its acceptability. Thus, the functions and even development of Amharic are commensurate with the modernization of the Ethiopian state and society.

3.3.1 Modern government as a vehicle

By and large, the unification of Ethiopia (save Eritrea) was essentially attained during the reign of Menlik (1889-1913). The old regional kings were effectively brought under his effective control. Their hereditary rulers were relegated to loyal subordinates with little or no power to challenge Menlik's authority. Furthermore, Menlik had also managed to institute modern ways of running the affairs of the country by appointing a cabinet comprising seven ministers (Darkwah 1975:26). Denied of their traditional authority --to impose and collect taxes, raise an army, and promulgate laws and engage in negotiations with foreign governments-- the regional leaders suffered a great setback (Markakis 1974).

At the same time, the status and prestige of Menlik were bolstered. The victory he achieved over the Italians in 1896 greatly added to his prestige. With the rise of Haile Sellasie to power, the regional kings had been systematically reduced to non-significant positions. Since 1942, and particularly after the 1960 coup, they have been replaced, for the most part, by

appointed officers of the central government. All are now the representatives of the emperor in Addis Ababa. As part of their responsibilities, they carry out the directives and protect the interest of the central authorities.

Consequently, the central government today has the need and the means to reach the people throughout the country and has accordingly structured the government. The administrative apparatus/division of the country is such that the chain of command reaches the remotest part of the country thereby further breaking the old political alliances and allegiances while establishing new ones that enhance the status and prestige of the king(s). The corresponding structure and regular conduct of the affairs of the state seem to have enhanced the new image of the state. That is, the people's concept of government has begun to change from the authority and whims of the powerful (king or regional lord) to that of the collective and the relatively institutionalized body called Mengist (government). This new concept, reinforced by various factors, has been steadily spreading to various parts of the country. And the language which has been used and identified with the new state apparatus, Mengist, is called Yemengist Quanqua (language of government).

3.3.2 Urbanization as an agent

Urbanization, as we know it today, is a recent phenomenon. It started sometime at the turn of the century. After the victory over the Italians in 1896, some measure of peace and order was

obtained in the country. Trade slowly but steadily began to grow. The new capital, Addis Ababa, founded at the geographical center of the country also became the new trade center. Highways were built connecting it to some of the important trade centers of some regions. With the establishement of the railways connecting Addis Ababa with part of Djibuti, it came to dominate the country's trade to a point where all imports and exports have to pass through the capital.

From the start, the composition of Addis Ababa was multiethnic and multilingual. The first settlers, the soldiers and retainers of the emperor and those of the various regional governors, were drawn from all parts of the country and represented virtually all ethnic groups. Addis Ababa was simply a macrocosm of the entire country in miniature. The communication needs of this highly multilingual town was met by Amharic. And there seems not to have been any incidence to the contrary. Amharic, as the language of the all-powerful emperor, perhaps was accepted as a logical choice. The fact that Addis Ababa was then a newly founded town might have made the use of Amharic easier than the case would have been if it were an old urban center with an established medium.

As Addis Ababa became increasingly cosmopolitan, its composition has accordingly become increasingly less diverse. In 1910, those who could be considered as Amharic first language speakers were less than one in five. In 1952 that figure rose to fifty percent, and in 1967 to three-quarters of the city's

population (Bender et al. 1976). Today, for all intents and purposes, Addis Ababa is an Amharic-speaking city. Amhaic has thus grown with the national capital and has assumed its prestige and has consequently been able to take advantage of its institutions and facilites.

The centralization of the political apparatus and the expansion of trade and communication facilities have facilitated urban centers throughout the country. The old garrison built in the last century has become permanent also. As regional, provincial, and district centers, they offer better opportunities than the countryside around them. Thus the centers have created conditions for interethnic contacts of major proportion. The language that serves the need of such multilingual urban centers is also Amharic. In their survey of 188 towns in Ethiopia, Cooper and Horvath (1976:171-8) found that "Amharic was claimed by the largest number of speakers; it was a majority language (76-100%) in the largest number of towns and a minority language (0-25%) in the smallest number of towns." In fact, urbanization in general has become an agent for the spread of Amharic in rural Ethiopia. This process of diffusion seems to have been facilitated by the presence of a large proportion of Amharic mother-tongue speakers in many of the urban centers (Cooper and Horvath 1976).

Industrialization, as an important aspect of modernization has also promoted the spread of Amharic. In the factories he studied, Cooper (1976b) found that "almost the entire work force knew Amharic." But industrialization has not yet developed in

Ethiopia, and its full impact on language diffusion is not yet felt in the country. Amharic, however, is the only tongue that is consistently associated with the technology and associated know-how that accompany industrialization. As things stand now, Amharic seems to have the potential of benefiting from industrialization if and when it is instituted in the country on a large scale.

3.3.3 Modern education

Modern education in particular is the other institution that serves as an agent of diffusion for Amharic in Ethiopia. Given its structure and functions, the educational system is the most consistent and systematic instrument for the continued spread and development of Amharic.

The first organized and state-supported modern schools were established at the turn of the century by Menlik II. Cognizant of the resistence of the powerful nobility and clergy to modern education, he himself became the patron of the new school system. He actively encouraged his lieutenants to do likewise in their respective regions and brought teachers from outside. He also sent his grandson and cousins to these schools in order to set an example (Pankhurst 1962) and perhaps to underscore the importance of these schools in the years to come.

In these early schools only two native tongues, Amharic and Geez, were taught along with French, English, Italian and Arabic. The important languages of education and those most

popular among students were French and English, respectively. No significance was attached to either Amharic or Geez. The students did not like them, and they were taught by church- educated persons of relatively low social standing. In time the teaching of Geez was terminated, leaving Amharic as the only native tongue to be taught. Amharic's popularity among students and its importance in the system did not change, although the leaders of the time had spoken on the importance of the learning of Amharic and Geez (Pankhurst 1962).

The fact that Amharic continued to be taught is important in and of itself. Firstly, it gained precedence over Geez, the old language of learning. Secondly, it eventually became part of the institution which was designated for the introduction of modern science and technology. Lastly, it came to be associated with the new educated elite that eventually came to occupy an important place in changing Ethiopia.

The impact of these schools prior to the Italian invasion (1936-1941) was very modest. The small number of educated people were to play important roles. Some became teachers, others civil servants, and still others writers. They were all advocates of modernization. In their respective domains, they helped to raise the consciousness of the general populace, and the medium they chose to use was Amharic.

After the War, the importance of these modern schools grew. Haile Sellasie, who had found his allies in educated people early in his political life, was one of the first to

recognize the importance of education. Thus a national educational system was established. The emperor himself was his own Minister of Education. The old schools were re-opened and new ones were also built in various parts of the country. Steadily, but admittedly slowly, the educational system soon began to grow.

Since the War, the languages used in the school system have been English and Amharic. English replaced French as the uncontested medium of education. The status of Amharic vis-à-vis English did not change, but compared to the pre-war years, its status has changed for the better. It has now gained a respectable place in the school system. For one, it began to be used as a medium of instruction for the first three grades. Secondly, and most importantly, it is now taught as one of the three compulsory subjects, including English and math, in the secondary schools. Until recently (1976), it was necessary for students to pass Amharic if they were to go to college. Even when the college entrance exams were prepared in London, Amharic was one of the compulsory subjects. Despite the fact that college education was offered in foreign languages, students were required to pass the Amharic exams. In the process, textbooks to teach Amharic were prepared and improved on in several occasions. Above all, Amharic became the accepted common tongue of the rising educated elite. In their capacities as modern civil servants, military and police officers, teachers, writers, journalists, and other professional people continued to use and spread it.

Following the promulgation of the Revised Constitution (1955), which formally decreed Amharic as the official language of the empire, the status of Amharic in the school system has been even further enhanced. In 1964, after some years of preparation and pilot studies, Amharic was made the medium of instruction in the elementary schools throughout the country. The significance of this decision is manifold. The status of Amharic is elevated. Its functional adequacy has been facilitated through the prepartaion of textbooks, teachers' manuals and other teaching materials. Teachers' training institutions began to change their curricula to suit the changing conditions.

Furthermore, the spread of Amharic seems to have become assured. Now that Amharic is the medium of instruction, all school children are exposed to it adequately. Since 1964, school children have been required to take a National General Examination at the end of their sixth year. As elementary education does not guarantee success, the pupils' desire to pass this exam is very high. Given their tender age and motivation, it is most likely that they all learn it very well. In the process, Amharic continues to spread in the areas where schools are opened, perhaps ensuring its place among the next generation.

After its success in the elementary schools, the state had evidently intended to extend the use of Amharic in the secondary schools also (Abraham 1970). To that effect, some projects were undertaken with the support of international institutions. In the summer of 1970, this writer was involved in such an effort.

Perhaps because of the rapidly changing conditions, no step was taken in this regard. Recently, the desire to revive the issue is evident. Discussions in the concerned institutions as how to best transfer to the Amharic medium in the secondary schools is underway (Richter, Ms). The Ethiopian Languages Academy seems to be responding to this need, perhaps inadvertently, when it sets out to develop the terminology of Amharic so that it is possible to translate any text up to and including the senior secondary school level. To this effect, support from UNDP has been obtained. Professionals from various fields are actively engaged in the project. As a result, some degree of success seems to have been achieved. However, given the present language policy, it is doubtful whether such a decision can be made. On the other hand, the langauge problem is mounting. The level of English proficiency is so low even the best of students who join the various colleges have demonstrated difficulty in following their lectures in English. It is possible that practical problems such as these may serve as catalysts for major decisions to be made in the near future.

In higher education, the place of Amharic has always been limited. Until 1974, only college (Freshman) Amharic was taught at that level. It has since been discontinued. In higher education the language of instruction and administration is English. Amharic is used by the University administration or a faculty or a department only when dealing with government institutions. The only department that uses Amharic for

instructional purposes is the Department of Ethiopian Languages and Literature. Since the primary purpose of this department is to train Amharic teachers for the secondary schools, Teachers' Training Institutions and other specialized schools, the status of Amharic has been positively enhanced by this limited use also. Many of the graduates of the department seem to have given the teaching of Amharic in the secondary schools some degree of credence.

The missionary schools have also served as agents for the diffusion of Amharic. As long ago as the 17th century, Amharic was the missionaries' choice, perhaps because Geez was extinct and could not have been an effective medium for the conversion of the people which they were trying to achieve. The use of Amharic by the early missionaries was limited because their stay in the country was short lived. However, they seem to have set the trend.

The second wave of missionaries started to come to Ethiopia in the early eighteen hundreds. They, too, chose to use Amharic. In this regard, what the missionaries of this century have done is more significant. Among other things, their numbers, and therefore, their activities have increased. Most importantly, recently they are required by law to operate in the areas that are considered outside the sphere of influence of the Ethiopian National Church. In other words, they have been limited, for the most part, to work in regions that are inhabitied by non-Amharic-speaking people. There, they have been teaching Amharic

and in Amharic too. Considering the significance of their contributions in literacy, health education, home economics, agriculture and religion, it is not difficult to imagine how much they have advanced the diffusion of Amharic. Through their various activities and publications, they have created conditions where Amharic could be spoken, read and written outside the traditional Amharic-speaking areas.

Another branch of education that also functions as an agent of the diffusion of Amharic is the National Literacy Program. In the early days, its impact was modest. Its budget was limited and was mostly staffed by volunteers. The materials used in the program were in Amharic and classes were conducted in it also. Among non-Amharic-speaking participants, the learning of Amharic as a second language and the acquisition of literacy was accomplished at the same time.

Since the 1974 Revolution, the literacy campaign program has changed in several aspects. Among other things, due consideration is given to the langauge diversity of the country. Along with Amharic, four other languages--Oromo, Somali, Tigrigna and Wellayita--are used. Nine others are being studied and may be used in the near future. However, the primary medium of the national literacy campaign is still Amharic.

Several factors seem to militate for the continued use of Amharic. The available manpower is one case in point. All those who are capable of teaching can do so in Amharic, because they are themselves the product of the school system that teaches

Amharic and in Amharic as well. The idea of using other languages is frustrated because the needed manpower is not available for some. For others, it may not be adequate or available at the site where it is most needed. In most bilingual situations, most towns, factories, the army, the police force, state farms, etc., Amharic is the preferred medium. Some participants also seem to favor Amharic to their first tongues. Those who are motivated to continue their studies beyond the literacy level need to know Amharic, because from that point on, education is provided in Amharic. For those who would like to go beyond the bounds of their communities looking for better opportunities, Amharic is particularly attractive.

3.3.4 The mass media

The mass media, an aspect of modernization, has also been instrumental for the extended use and spread of Amharic. From the start, the primary medium of the media, destined for a national audience, has been Amharic. As such, the two have developed to the same extent.

In Ethiopia, the first weekly, an Amharic-French medium, appeared in Harar in 1890. Two years later, Ayimro, and three years after that Atbia Kokeb, both Amharic weeklies, began circulating in Addis Ababa (Abdu 1976:505). With the advent of the printing press, their circulation greatly increased. However, the real impact of print media came about when the Department of Press and Information, later a ministry, was established in 1941,

and the media as an important arm of a modernizing state apparatus was recognized.

The dailies, weeklies and other periodicals that began to appear in regular fashion and in large numbers are in Amharic. In addition, those branches of the government that needed to have their own papers also chose Amharic as a medium. The Armed Forces have their own Amharic weeklies. The police force has a popular national paper too. Regional towns that were able to have their own papers, like Harar and Gondar, did the same. Except for Tigrigna and most recently Oromo, no other native tongue is used in print media. The Tigrigna paper, one of the oldest, has a limited circulation and serves the Asomera area only.

The overall story in the oral media is not any different. The main tongue of television broadcasting is Amharic. The daily evening news, news analysis and some social programs are all conducted in Amharic. If and when government decrees or directives are issued, the medium is Amharic. In radio broadcasting some other Ethiopian languages are used, but to a limited extent. In recent years, however, their use has been increased substantially. According to the 1979 program, close to half (43.3%) of the broadcasting time has been allocated for these language services. Oromo language programs run 18.52% of the total; Tigrigna for 13.89%; Somali, Tigre and Afar each for 4.63% of the total time. Amharic language programs accounted for 37.50% of the time. The rest was allocated for English, French and Arabic language programs. Measures like this could be

considered as part of the overall effort to "correct the weakness of the previous radio broadcasting which has missed its logical audience" (Abdu 1976:507). There is also an effort to establish regional stations like those in Harar and Asmera to ensure the continued use of these languages. The educational services in various regional tongues is also promising in this regard.

As the uses of various regional tongues increases, a new pattern of language function in radio broadcasting seems to be emerging. More and more, the regional tongues seem to concentrate on purposes that are mainly of regional and local importance, while Amharic tends to be used for those that are national. This diglossic relationship may help create the conditions and the attitude for the continued use and diffusion of Amharic in rural Ethiopia.

3.4 Amharic as a biherawi quanqua

The use of the term biherawi quanqua (National Language) in reference to Amharic is a recent phenomenon. It dates back to the 1960's. By the early 1970's, the media and other public institutions had begun to use it freely and routinely.

The term national language is used here to refer to languages that function at the supra-ethnic level in multilingual socities. In this regard, national languages are common tongues, but they are more than that. They have a symbolic function, which they attained as a result of higher social developments achieved in their respective societies. With the rise of capitalism--

urbanization, industrialization, commercialization, mass means of communication and attendant sociocultural progress-- the narrow ethnic boundaries began to break. Consequently, the various regions become interdependent making contact among the ethnic groups regular and extensive and a necessary aspect of their life. In fact, many people were drawn from various parts of the country and came to work in the factories, live in the cities, and send their children to the same schools. That gave rise to a new and common culture. As part of the overall transformation of society, one of the tongues evolved and became not only a common tongue, but also a symbol of the emerging common identity-- the nation.

The particular case of Ethiopia is different from this. Ethiopia is a developing country. The level of its urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization of its economy is very low. That is, the material conditions that could have brought its various groups closer together are accordingly weak. In spite of all this, however, there has been a growing aspiration for nationhood in the country.

The beginning of this aspiration can be traced back to the middle of the last century when Ethiopia was suddenly awakened from its long isolation and found that its sovereignty was seriously threatened. The threat was so real that it arounsed great concern among the various regional leaders of the time. Cognizant of the impending danger, these leaders were each engaged in seeking ways and means of establishing and maintaining

strong defences. In the civil war that followed, they allied and reallied and fought against each other until at last Tewodros emerged victorious. Thus, the history of modern Ethiopia began (Rubenson 1976, 1984).

Tewodros' (1855-68) primary aim was to establish "a united, strong and progressive Ethiopian state" (Rubenson 1976:71). For various reasons he did not accomplish what he set out to achieve. Although his success was limited, his reign has become significant, because "it initiated the unification and modernization process by revealing the problems involved and making the first attempt to find solutions" (Rubenson 1976:76). What is even more significant is the legacy that was created after him and which has captured the imaginations of poets, dramatists and novelists. For many Ethiopians he is a national hero and a resolute and determined defender of the country. His tragic death has also become part of the legend and seems to have advanced national unity and independence. Among the educated, he is a farsighted leader who earnestly fought against traditionalism and for modernization. His modest family background has been particularly inspirational to the group which has come to subscribe to an "achieved" status as opposed to an "ascribed" one.

The sucessors of Tewodros had inherited his vision along with the throne. Confronted with the same sort of problems, they were primarily engaged in maintaining national unity, which they did. They were thus able to frustrate the ambitions of the

country's enemies time and again. For example, Yohannes IV and his generals defeated the Italians, Turks and Egyptians on several occasions. Yohannes' death, like that of Tewodros' before him, has strengthened the national unity, because he too died while defending the country. Seven years later, Manlik II scored a decisive victory over the Italians in a major war and was able to maintain the national independence and advance the unity even further.

Menlik's victory was significant in many ways. Internationally, Ethiopia was able to secure its place among the community of nations. Menlik's government was recognized by several foreign powers, who estabished their consulates in Addis Ababa. Soon after, they sent their representatives to Addis Ababa in order "to negotiate treaties, demarcate borders, establish commercial relations and gain concessions" (Markakis 1974:144). For his part, Manlik defined the extent and limits of his country and made it known to all concerned. On the home front, his victory had even more significance. Out of the war came a unitied Ethiopia. The various regional leaders not only fought under him but also came to recognize his authority. They became part of the building of the new state. His capital, the new commercial and cultural center of the country, began to attract promising people from various parts of the country including Eritrea which was then under the Italian colonial rule (S. Pankhurst 1955). This group along with the modern educated people became the architects of the emerging state. The modern state apparatus which he was

able to institute eventually became an important instrument for the dissemination of the idea of belonging to one nation. This has been particularly true in recent years. During Haile Sellasie's reign, a relatively high degree of institutionalization and centralization of political authority has been acheived because of the lesson learned and because the people who run the system are better educated than were their predecessors.

Modern education, by its nature and function, has even been a more consistent and systematic agent of the diffusion of the notion of nationhood in Ethiopia. Right from the start the new schools were established with the expressed purpose "to promote pride in Ethiopia's freedom and independence, and in the maintenance, honoured and respected, of her frontiers as well as to produce a confident firmness in the hearts of her people" (Pankhurst 1962:266). To that effect the regional leaders were urged to open and support such schools and send their children also. To do so was viewed as a token of one's own devotion and love to the country (Pankhurst 1962).

As could be expected, the graduates of these schools have willingly accepted the responsibility and challenge of advancing the causes of unity, modernization, and maintenance of national sovereignty. We need educated people," declared Ashebr G. Hiwot, one of the early educated Ethiopians, "in order to ensure our peace, to reconstruct our country and to enable it to exist as a great nation in the face of European nations" (cited in Pankhurst 1962:256). Both in time of peace and war they stood together and

for the good of their country. Before and during the Italian invasion (1936-41), they used every means at their disposal to raise the consciousness of the people and to organize them to fight against the enemy. Their heroism was such that the Italians were so alarmed that they "singled out this group for special savage treatment" (Markakis 1974:146). All this did not deter them. If any thing, the Italian invasion had "helped to stimulate a new sense of Ethiopian nationalism" (Clapham 1984:461). It also helped to break down the local autonomy further, making the various patriotic leaders, who were more traditional in their orientation and regional in their politics, bearers of national independence and unity (Clapham 1984).

In their struggle against tradition and the forces of reaction within the country, educated Ethiopians have also advanced national unity and modernization. In their effort to educate the populace, they earned the enmity of the nobility and clergy. Using popular literature as a means, they exposed the sources of ignorance, poverty and degradation of the people. In their writings "there is an overt critique of Ethiopian society and mores. All emphasize, in varying degrees, the need to abolish the exorbitant principles of the feudal lords, to outgrow obsolete supersition and degraded custom, to accept technological change" (Gerard 1971:303).

In dealing with issues of national concern, educated Ethiopians managed to develop a national literature in Amharic. The development of the national literature, in its turn,

helps to "itimate that Ethiopia's official language is being increasingly recognized as a genuine national lingua-fraca and cultural tongue" (Gerard 1971:355). For the most part, the educated have served "the cause of unity, because their parochial loyalties are suppressed by their loyalties to a progressive and united Ethiopia" (Abraham 1969).

The other factor that has promoted the national awareness is the country's increasing contact with the outside world. Since Ethiopia emerged from its isolation, its international relations have steadily grown. It was a member of the League of Nations and has been a member of the United Nations since its inception. It is also a founding member of the Organization of African Unity and Non-aligned Nations. Addis Ababa is the headquarters of the OAU and the Economic Commission for Africa. Consequently, the city's international community is growing. In addition, Ethiopians have also begun to travel abroad on a variety of missions. Thus, through various means, Ethiopians are presented with the opportunity to compare and contrast their society and culture with those of others. Therefore, a growing number of them have become overtly critical of their government and society. At the same time, these same contacts have enabled them to appreciate some of what they have. Among these sources of national pride is the fact that the national language is indigenous and their literacy heritage is the product of native effort and ingenuity. As Levine remarked, "even among those who are not Amharic speakers, those who are aware of the situation

elsewhaere in Africa tend to take pride in the fact that their national language is indigenous, not as is true in most other African countries an alien tongue" (cited in Gerald 1971:355).

The momentum of the building of Ethiopia's nationhood seems to have reached its peak in the 1960's. In the area of language use and status this was spelled out in the efforts of some people who attempted to strengthen the national status of Amharic. The proponents were unorganized but were comprised of individuals from various ethnic groups and professions, and some were members of the National Language Academy who had initiated public discussion in the media. The discussion focused on the symbolic functions of Amharic. It was believed that the name Amharic was not a facilitating factor. In fact, "Amharic" was considered an inappropriate name for a national language because of its affiliation with the name of one of the ethnic groups-- the Amhara. It was argued that the name of the national language should be neutral and should be free of any sectarian connotation. Thus, an all inclusive name, Ityopyawigna (Ethiopia) was suggested as a solution. The rational was that with a neutral name, the national language would become truely national. It was also hoped that the neutral name would serve as an integrating and unifying factor (Hailu, personal communication).

Since the Revolution, however, the policy as well as the general perception towards the notion of "national language" have changed. In fact, with the promulgation of the National Democratic Revolution Program (1976), all languages are accorded

equal status. Amharic does not have official status anymore. Nevertheless, it has continued to be used in the various domains and for even more occasions and purposes than before, because the Revolution has opened more opportunities for its use. Amharic publications have increased both in kind and number. On the other hand, its symbolic function has been limited. Despite its extended use, the promotion of Amharic to national language status is not officially sanctioned. In the Draft Constitution (1986), however, it is recognized as the working language of the government of Ethiopia.

3.5 Why an indegeneous tongue was chosen

It has so far been argued that along with the modernization and unification of the country, the need for a common tongue arose and that need was met by Amharic. One wonders why Ethiopia did not choose one of the tongues-- English, French, or Italian-- that best suited the purpose of modernization. One may even argue that the purpose of unification would have been better achieved if any one of these tongues were used because they were equally alien to all ethnic groups in the country thus denying privileged status to all groups alike.

The answer to this question may be found in the particular history of Ethiopia. As Levine (1974) remarked, "the Ethiopian state represents an historic nation which has largely preserved its own institutions, elites and cultures from displacement by Western forms of authorities." Thus, from its advent,

modernization (institutions, materials, and know-how) was not destined to replace old values altogether but to supplement them. In contrast to other countries, in Ethiopia the overall decision as to what and how much innovation was needed was the prerogative of the national forces. For the most part, external forces were limited to advisory capacities. Their presence and degree of influence were therefore checked to a considerable extent. Besides, the foreign forces were of varied national origin with differing and conflicting interests. They were often jealous of each other's success to the extent of impeding each other's progress. This enabled the national forces to better control and at times even manipulate the foreign forces to their own advantages (Pankhurst 1962, Aleme 1973). Consequently, no one external force was able to make the desired impact for its language to become a lingua franca or an official tongue in Ethiopia.

The indegenous forces that could have prompted any one of these tongues to official status were at first weak and divided. In fact, at the time when the crucial steps were taken, this group did not exist as a viable political force. In time, its strength and influence may have grown but never to the extent of becoming a contender to political power. The local force's independent political existence has only recently begun. In the past, it existed as an appendage to one or another of the traditional forces. From the start, it was divided into factions. One group was comprised of educated French and the

other educated English people with no desire or ability to assume political power. The contention between them was such that it seems to have adversely affected the success of one or the other group.

Above all, at the time when the need for a common tongue was growing, the forces associated with foreign tongues had no influence in the country. They were also generally perceived as adversaries. The attempt of some to colonize the country was current then and deeply resented. The Portuguese missionaries' venture to convert the people to their faith, which plunged the country into a civil war, was not yet forgotten. This was especially true among the clergy and the nobility, a formidable power block that was not particularly appreciative of the idea of modernization and change in the first place. In fact, the continued intervention of these foreign forces had precipitated the rise of national awareness among the people and strong suspicion towards foreigners.

However, it should be noted that the country has been appreciative of the progress made by the foreign forces. Consequently, its desire was great to acquire their languages as vehicles of science and technology which were badly needed. But Ethiopia seems to have reserved the right to be selective of what it wanted to take. In the schools, for example, foreign languages began to be taught and/or used as the media of instruction early on. Nevertheless, the learning of Amharic and Geez was not excluded. In principle, the learning of the native tongues was

considered an important component of nation-building and a necessary prerequisite for the learning of the foreign languages and the skills and know-how through them (Pankhurst 1962).

With the advent and expansion of modernization and attendant culture, institutions and social organizations, the use of foreign languages, especially English, has steadily grown. English is now the only medium of instruction for the secondary schools and the institutes of higher education. The country conducts its international trade and diplomacy in English. Outside such specialized domains, the impact of English is rather very limited. A new diglossic relationship has thus been created between Amharic and English. English is used in scientific, technical and international domains, while Amharic is used in those that are national, official and formal.

In some ways, the position that English has come to occupy is comparable to the one Geez previously held. Just like Geez before it, English is not used outside some specialized domains. If the people involved are all Ethiopians, irrespective of their ethnic composition, the medium preferred for oral discourse is Amharic. It is not uncommon for professional Ethiopians to discuss the matter of their concern in Amharic and write the result in English. Even among professionals, one who tends to use English among fellow Ethiopians is hardly appreciated, although a good command of English is highly valued but only when used appropriately.

No foreign tongue, including English, has been made available to the people at large. English is the widely used foreign tongue but has not become a contact language in the country. It is not used for everyday purposes by any group, and there are no native speakers. Except for a few specialized agencies, English is not used in government administration either. A very large part of the bureaucracy either does not know it or does not have a good command of the language. Thus, the conditions have never been conducive for the introduction of a foreign tongue to become a common medium in Ethiopia.

4. Summary and conclusion

Modernization is not a total success story in Ethiopia. A lot remains to be desired, but progress is being made. In contrast to its past, modern Ethiopia has made certain strides which have altered the statuses and functions of its various tongues. The structure and functions of its state apparatus are more institutionalised and continue to be so. Modern public education is increasingly made available to a growing number of people and in various parts of the country. The impact of the market economy is being felt by more and more people. Urban centers are mushrooming throughout the coutry and are influencing the regions around them. Mass means of communication have made travel within the country relatively easy. Consequently, in present-day Ethiopia, the reasons for and the means through which interethnic contacts are made have become

steady and extensive. It is because of these reasons that the need for a common medium has arisen, and it is in accordance with these needs that the diffusion of the common medium has been realized.

Today, unlike in traditional Ethiopia, all those who have access to political power also have access to the medium of the government they intend to replace. Thus, there is no compelling reason or practical need to change the language of government whenever one government is replaced by another. As a matter of fact, the odds are against change. The structure and functions of the government have now become sufficiently complex to require the continued use of the common tongue. The national elite that is increasingly needed to run the bureaucracy and such other national institutions has developed vested interest in the continued use of the common tongue. The fact that Amharic is that medium is an accident of history. Whatever the language is, there is a need for a common tongue in the country.

At the initial stage, the dominance of some languages over others in multilingual societies is attributed, primarily, to the hierarchical nature of their social systems. In Ethiopia, the state with the Niguse Negest (King of Kings) at its head had existed for over two millenia. Consequently, it was the langauges that were associated with the persons and institutions of power, authority and corresponding social prestige that attained prominence early on. Once that association is attained, it becomes a factor in itself for the continued dominance of that

tongue over others. Amharic, which was spoken in a rather compact area in what is now the Wellow Administrative Region, by the beginning of this millenium began to spread out as soon as it bacame a Lisane Nigus (King's tongue) (Taddesse 1972). Early on, it spread to the adjoining regions of Gojjam, Gondar, Shewa and Wello. These are now generally referred to as traditional Amharic-speaking regions. Because of its privileged status, it was gradually introduced as the auxiliary medium of religion and education and has eventually become the primary medium of writing. Now it is a relatively more developed and standardized language with an extensive literary heritage appealing to a growing number of people. As the working language of the government (the largest employer), the school system, and other national institutions, Amharic is also closely associated with better opportunities. It is thus gaining ground among the young and educated generation. In general, bilingualism in Amharic is steadily on the rise. The revolutionary reorganization of the Ethiopian society and the change in its language policy does not seem to affect this general trend.

In Ethiopia "the single lingua franca" (Greenberg 1966: 52) may be in the making. However, as things now stand, the factors are not sufficienty strong for the process to be consummated. That is, before Amharic becomes a truely common tongue, it must serve the urban as well as the rural, the center as well the periphery. It must also attain a higher level of development. For all these to happen, the country as a whole has to attain a

higher level of socioeconomic and cultural development. Secondly, the type of language policy that the state will choose to follow will also be important in this regard. The prevailing conditions dictate that the policy be pluralistic in orientation and democratic in approach. The practice of promoting Amharic as a common/national tongue at the expense of other languages, as in the past, will only have adverse consequences. Therefore, it is imperative that the policy account for the needs of the people associated with the uses of local, national and international languages. Along with the overall social development, it is democratic social practices that will ensure the further development of the common/national language in Ethiopia, as in other developing countries.

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